



# News Release

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## **Power outages may raise risk of carbon monoxide poisoning**

*Don't use grills or gas generators in enclosed areas*

**OLYMPIA** — Barbecue grills and gas generators may seem like they could double as an indoor furnace during a power outage, but that can be downright dangerous. Neither should be used inside to heat homes, as families could get sick and even die from carbon monoxide poisoning.

Carbon monoxide, or CO, is a poisonous gas that can't be seen or smelled and can kill a person in minutes. Carbon monoxide is produced whenever any fuel such as gas, oil, kerosene, wood, or charcoal is burned. It can quickly build up to unsafe levels in enclosed or semi-enclosed areas.

"Every time there's a power outage I worry that someone will try to stay warm by bringing a fuel-burning appliance inside," said Nancy Bernard, indoor air advisor for the Department of Health. "It doesn't take too much or too long for carbon monoxide to make someone sick or to kill them – and the tragic truth is that it happens every winter."

Nationally, hundreds of people die accidentally every year from carbon monoxide poisoning caused by appliances that are not used properly or that are malfunctioning. Carbon monoxide can build up so quickly that victims are overcome before they can get help. Once inhaled, carbon monoxide can cause permanent brain damage, chest pains, or heart attacks. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include headache, weakness, dizziness, confusion, fatigue, and nausea.

All homes should have working carbon monoxide alarms. Washington law has required them in new construction since 2011 and in existing apartments and other rental units since January 2013. For details see the State Building Code Council's [Carbon Monoxide Alarm site](#).

To avoid carbon monoxide poisoning never use a [charcoal or gas grill in an enclosed space](#). Charcoal should also never be burned in a fireplace. A charcoal fire will not create a chimney draft strong enough to push the carbon monoxide to the outside. It's also unsafe to use a gas oven

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for heat. Never run a car engine or a generator in a garage, and [keep generators at least 20 feet from buildings](#). Even at that distance, air flow patterns could still blow carbon monoxide into homes through attic vents, windows, or doors, so it's important to have a working carbon monoxide detector inside the home.

Sources of carbon monoxide include motor vehicles; small gasoline powered equipment; burning charcoal, wood, or gas; blocked chimney flues' gas or kerosene heaters, camp stoves, and lanterns.

The [Department of Health website](http://www.doh.wa.gov) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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